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City riding high on EPA award

Its workplace benefits for commuters earn national recognition

By Sarah Post, Staff Writer
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Richardson is the first North Texas city to be named a Best Workplace for Commuters. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Department of Transportation created the Best Workplaces for Commuters program to highlight companies and organizations that meet national standards of excellence in commuter benefits. Such benefits include monthly transit subsidies, carpool and vanpool matching, telecommuting, walking and biking programs, and education on the relationship between air quality and transportation options.

Employers eligible for the Best Workplaces for Commuters designation rank among the top 1 percent of all employers in the nation for providing these benefits. The only other Dallas County employer to receive the designation this year is the EPA Region 6 office in Dallas. Houston, which the EPA has designated a "serious non-attainment area" for air quality standards, is the only other Texas city to qualify this year. Richardson Mayor Gary Slagel pointed to the City Council statement of goals, which include both environmental and workplace initiatives.

"This designation is a great way to show a linkage between what we would like to see and what we can make happen," said Mr. Slagel. Among city employees, between 180 and 200, or 8 to 10 percent, participate every month in the city's Travel Demand Management Program.

Employees make use of the program in some of the following ways:

- *Ten to 15 buy city subsidized monthly DART passes.
- *Thirty commute using vanpools from as far as Pilot Point.
- *Thirty obtain free DART day passes from the city to attend work-related meetings.
- *Ten to 12 walk or bike to work.
- *Fifteen walk or bike to lunch.

Kim Farwell, who administers the Travel Demand Management Program, said local companies frequently ask the city for advice in beginning similar programs. "This couldn't have come at a better time," Ms. Farwell said. "Companies are looking at where to begin, and we're here to set a good example."

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